

Minutes of the Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE of the BUCKINGHAMSHIRE AND MILTON KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY held remotely on WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2020 at 11.00 AM

Present: Councillors Clarke OBE, Hall, Hopkins, Lambert, Marland (part), McCall, McLean and Walsh

Officers: J Thelwell (Chief Fire Officer), M Osborne (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), G Britten (Director of Legal and Governance), M Hemming (Director of Finance and Assets), A Hussain (Deputy Director of Finance and Assets), S Gowanlock (Corporate Planning Manager), D Norris (Head of Prevention, Response and Resilience) and K Nellist (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies: None.

Live webcast broadcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWmIXPWAscxpL3vIiv7bh1Q>

The Director of Legal and Governance confirmed the webcast was live and apologised for the delay in starting the meeting. The meeting commenced at 11.00 am.

The Chairman briefed Members on an exception item before they considered the reports on the agenda, by saying:

"I am sure most of you are aware that the Government is currently conducting an Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. The Integrated Review replaces previously separate reviews into foreign policy, defence, national security and international development. It combines the scope of these individual reviews, making it the most comprehensive review of this type carried out by the UK government since the Cold War.

The Review reports to the Prime Minister and the National Security Council supported by a cross-Whitehall team in the Cabinet Office and a small team in No.10. It is intended to be a policy-led, evidence-driven whole-of-government process. It goes well beyond the parameters of a traditional defence and security review and will take into account the current and projected domestic, as well as global, context through to 2030.

On the 13 August the Cabinet Office issued a 'call for evidence' in relation to the Integrated Review to which, given its scope, we have responded both by means of a contribution to the Thames Valley Resilience Forum's response and separately in our own right. Our response was submitted to the Cabinet Office last Friday (11 September), which was the deadline for responses to the call for evidence, following review with Keith McLean in his capacity as Lead Member for Corporate Risk and at the Fire Authority Leaders meeting of last Thursday (10 September).

I am now going to hand over to Stuart Gowanlock, our Corporate

Planning Manager, who led on compiling our response, who will give you a little more on the background to, and nature of our response.”

(Councillor Marland joined the meeting)

The Corporate Planning Manager advised Members that the Chairman had comprehensively covered the background to the review, but the Call for Evidence was a bit unusual both in terms of its timing, launched in mid-August when, even with the constraints of Covid, many people were on leave and also the time given to respond, only four weeks for something of national strategic importance.

The haste was largely down to the fact that work on the broad scope of the Review had paused due to the need to divert government resources to focus on the response to Covid-19 and, also, the need to closely align it with the impending spending review hence the compressed timeframe.

In terms of shaping the Authority’s response, some guidance had been received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), via the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF), in particular they:

- Encouraged us to ‘think big’ and not to feel constrained in the evidence that we provide; and, also,
- To include examples of issues even if we don’t have a solution.

The Authority’s response endeavoured to rise to that challenge, but also offer input that is credible coming from a fire and rescue service and Category 1 responder in terms of the potential range of civil contingencies that we might be expected to address.

The Call for Evidence invited respondents to answer a set of 8 questions. However, Members would see the Authority had responded to all of the questions apart from one which was very much for those with military and defence expertise. The Authority had sought to underpin its responses with evidence from reputable open sources.

As yet the Authority doesn’t have an indication of when the outcomes of the review would be published, but this may well be aligned with the Comprehensive Spending Review timetable. Once the outcomes were received, they would be reviewed and Members would be updated with any implications for fire and rescue services generally that may arise out of the Review.

Following the meeting, the Democratic Services Officer would be circulating the Call for Evidence together with the full text of the Authority’s response to all Members.

EX11**MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 15 July 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX12**BUDGET MONITORING REPORT APRIL – JULY 2020**

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that this report presented the provisional revenue and capital outturn position and debt management performance to 31 July 2020. Table 1 showed the budget and actual expenditure for each Directorate. The budget of £31,339m compared to the forecast outturn of £30.816m gave a forecast underspend of £0.524m. Furthermore, the level of funding was showing a favourable variance of £0.836m which had resulted in a net overall underspend of £1.359m.

The Deputy Director of Finance and Assets advised Members that the Authority's fuel supplier had provided free fuel for emergency services vehicles between April and June, which had resulted in additional underspend in fuel costs.

The Deputy Director of Finance and assets advised Members that there was also a new table in the report of what the Authority had spent against Covid-19. The Authority had received approximately £91k last financial year, and £606k this financial year in relation to the Covid pandemic. This was additional funding to cover costs that the service may incur. To date, the Authority had incurred costs of around £375k for the year, which had resulted in an underspend of £236k against a budget the Authority had received in 2020/21.

Due to Covid-19, there was a delay in the delivery of four appliances relating to 2019/20, two appliances were to be delivered in January 2021 and two appliances were due to be delivered at the earliest in May 2021. Therefore, a slippage of £200k had been forecast for the final appliance payments in 2021/22. Red fleet appliances were forecasting an underspend of £100k due to collaborating and joint tendering with the neighbouring fire services, resulting in the cost of the appliances being lower than budgeted.

A Member asked if a letter could be sent to BP offering the Authority's appreciation and thanks for the free fuel. It was agreed that a letter would be sent to BP signed by the three group leaders.

A Member asked if the government could ask for the Covid-19 grant money to be repaid and was advised that the Covid funding was unringfenced and therefore unlikely to be clawed back. However, the expectation by Treasury might be for the Authority to utilise the residual balance with any shortfall in funding next financial year.

A Member asked for clarification regarding the pensions consultation and was advised that this referred to the government's response to the McCloud/Sargeant remedy which was in relation to the age discrimination. The government was charged with making a remedy to the situation as it was found to have unlawfully discriminated as a result of tapering people into the new scheme based on age. In July, the government published a consultation setting out how they proposed to remedy the situation. That had allowed the Government Actuary Department (GAD) to resume their cost review which had been paused, to undertake a full valuation of the scheme based on this new information and how it would be transferred into a legacy scheme. This would set the future employer contribution rates for the service.

A Member asked due to the Covid pandemic and income streams being affected (unemployment, businesses closing etc.), how would this impact on the Authority with regard to council tax and business rates collections from Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire Council and was advised that in year the Authority would still receive the money it should have received, but the following year, if there was a deficit (or surplus), less (or more) money would be received.

A Member asked a question regarding the People and Organisational Development directorate and part of the underspend being due to a member of staff being on maternity leave and their role being shared between the existing team, were those picking up the additional duties getting paid extra during that period and was advised that the role had been slightly repurposed, so would not be costing anymore.

RESOLVED –

1. That the latest projected outturn forecast for the Authority as at 31 July 2020 be noted.
2. That £500k is transferred into the Revenue Contribution to Capital Reserve.
3. That £230k is transferred into the COVID-19 reserve.

EX13

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED –

It was moved and resolved that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as the minutes and appendices contain information relating to any individual; and Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 as the minutes and appendices contain information relating to the financial or business affairs of a person; and on these grounds it is considered, at this moment in time, that the need to keep information exempt outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The Chairman advised viewers of the live webcast that the meeting would now go into private session to hear the report and discuss the recommendations.

EX14 EXEMPT MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Exempt Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday 15 July 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

EX15 SUCCESSION PLANNING – BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND RESILIENCE

The Committee considered the report and appendices, details of which were noted in the confidential/exempt minutes.

EX16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting would be held on Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 10.00am.

THE CHAIRMAN CLOSED THE MEETING AT 11.55 AM.